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Special Issue Call for Papers

Digitally Enabled Sharing Economy Models at the Base of the Pyramid

Short Title (SI: Sharing Economy at the BoP)

Special Issue Guest Editors

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Introduction

The sharing economy, *a digitally enabled transaction system in which underutilized assets or services are shared among peers, groups, or organizations, for commercial or social reasons,* has grown exponentially in both scale and scope over the past years (Qureshi et al., 2021a). Accordingly, the range of products and services currently offered through digitally-enabled sharing economy models have also expanded dramatically to include resources such as transportation (Blablacar, Lyft, Uber), accommodation (Airbnb, Couchsurfing), office space (LiquidSpace, PivotDesk), as well as a diverse range of services such as training (Skillshare, Fitmob) and labor (Taskrabbit, Thumbtack).

The success of sharing economy models has inspired digital social innovators (Qureshi et al., 2021d) to implement similar models at the base of the pyramid[1] (BoP) to address social issues, including poverty and social exclusion. Some notable examples are bHive (Escobedo et al., 2021), Digital Green (Pandey et al., 2021), Drishtee (Pillai et al., 2021b), Ethidrade (Hota et al., 2021), Farmizen (Pillai et al., 2021a), Moving Feast (Bhatt et al., 2021), and Pinduoduo (Qiu et al., 2021). Although emerging literature has explored some of these models, there is a dearth of research on digitally-enabled sharing economy models at the BoP.

Research Themes

Qureshi and colleagues present a 3S sharing economy framework for BoP that includes three dimensions: the scope of sharing, the possibility of socialization, and the degree of social intermediation (2021b, 2021c). Each of these dimensions can leverage digital technology to

[1] A diverse group of 4 billion people (57% of the world's population) who earn less than two US$ a day in local economic purchasing power (Hota et al., 2019; Kistruck et al., 2013). Our choice of term *base-of-the-pyramid* (Kistruck et al., 2013; Parthiban et al., 2021) is intentional. We are not comfortable with the term *bottom-of-the-pyramid* is due to the connotation of making fortune for multinational companies by selling to poor (Qureshi et al., 2021d, see endnote 1 on p 662 for more details). We are also not comfortable using "bottom" to refer to a population that has been marginalized due to our own misplaced priorities and development policies. We instead prefer "base" that indicate these populations are foundations of all other social and economic activities. The focus of the *base-of-the-pyramid* initiatives are on developing capabilities, generating livelihoods, and empowering these populations (Parthiban et al., 2020a; 2021; Qureshi et al., 2018, Shalini et al., 2021).

bring social change and create social impact. The scope of sharing refers to the breadth and depth of peer-to-peer sharing that a model facilitates, in contrast to a model that only facilitates access to assets on fee (Escobedo et al., 2021; cf. Benjaafar et al., 2019; Stofberg et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2019). The scope of sharing can be deepened (i.e., more multiway sharing on the same service/ product) and broadened (adding multiple services and products on the same platform) by leveraging digital platforms for sharing (Escobedo et al., 2021; Leong et al., 2017; Qureshi et al., 2021b).

The possibility of socialization represents the opportunities offered by a sharing economy model that encourage social interactions instead of purely commercial transactions (Qureshi & Fang, 2011; Qureshi et al., 2018a). Sometimes social capital is the most valuable asset in most of the BoP communities (Bhatt 2017; Pillai et al., 2021a); it is vital for social economy models designed for BoP communities to integrate digital technologies in such a way that it leverages social capital and help sustain social cohesion within these communities (Escobedo et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021b; Qureshi et al., 2021b). Digitally enabled sharing economy models can either create new opportunities for socialization or supplement existing socialization activities (Escobedo et al., 2021).

The degree of social intermediation refers to an attenuated level of opportunism by the intermediaries who implement the social economy model at the BoP (Kistruck et al., 2013, Parthiban et al., 2020, 2021; Qureshi et al., 2021b; Shalini et al., 2021). Given the resource constraints and involvement of marginalized communities in BoP, the sustainable sharing economy models are more likely to be implemented by social entrepreneurs and socially-oriented organizations rather than by commercial organizations. These sharing economy models can leverage digital technology for social intermediation to reduce information asymmetry and transaction costs (Parthiban et al., 2020, 2021, Pillai et al., 2021a; Shalini et al., 2021).

Even though there is some early understanding of digitally enabled sharing economy models for BoP (Qureshi et al., 2021a), this nascent stream of research requires more evidence based knowledge on how these models evolve, how they become self-sustainable, how they tackle issue of resource constraints, how they overcome issues related to trust, privacy, and security, how they equitably distribute value generated by these models, and what role technology affordances play in structuring these models. Thus, we ask which societal challenges can be addressed through digitally-enabled sharing economy models for BoP, particularly in contexts of weak, conflicting, or exclusionary institutions (Bhatt, 2021; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017; Shalini et al., 2021). We highlight some of these themes below but hasten to add that they are by no means exhaustive.

Privacy, Trust and Security Issues in the Sharing Economy at the BoP

With the rise in the digitally enabled sharing economy models, the privacy and security concerns of such models and their implications have also heightened (Teubner and Flath, 2019). Evidence suggests that privacy and security issues can deter widespread participation in the digitally enabled sharing economy models (Lutz, 2018). However, more importantly, these potential privacy and security issues can make the BoP communities even more vulnerable, given their illiteracy and lack of awareness about their rights and responsibilities concerning their participation in the digitally enabled sharing economy models (Qureshi et al. 2021b, 2021c). However, there is little research on the implications of privacy and security concerns intrinsic to the digitally enabled sharing economy models for the BoP communities. Thus, this call for papers encourages such research that examines the implications of privacy and security

issues of sharing economy models at the BoP. Further, it would be interesting to examine whether and how intermediaries that implement sharing economy models identify and mitigate such privacy and security concerns or exploit the BoP communities' vulnerabilities.

The sharing economy and resource constraints at the BoP

Resource-constrained environments (Hota et al., 2019, Parthiban et al., 2020; Pandey et al., 2021) present special challenges and offer unique opportunities to leverage digitally-enabled sharing economy models. The sharing economy has the potential to optimize limited resources available within the BoP communities. What can we learn from these resource-constrained contexts about emerging digitally-enabled sharing economy models for BoP? While some social enterprise models, such as social intermediation or bricolage (Hota et al., 2019; Kistruck et al., 2013), may contribute to the sharing economy, the potential benefits and risks of the digitally enabled sharing economy models in the BoP context remain underexplored. While most of the focus of BoP research has been on Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, pockets of the BoP population exist throughout the world, as exemplified in the extreme poverty among African American communities in the US (Shaefer & Edin, 2013), refugees and immigrants in Europe (Calavita & Kitty, 2005), cage-home dwellers in Hong Kong and homelessness in Japan (Kennett & Mizuuchi, 2010), and indigenous communities in Australia (Eversole et al., 2013). Thus, for the purpose of this call, we encourage submission from resource-poor contexts of both developed and developing countries.

The sharing economy and socio-cultural practices at the BoP

The vast majority of those at the BoP are engaged in the informal economy and live in rural areas or urban slums, where informal institutions, such as religion, social norms, and traditions, take precedence over weak or non-functional formal institutions (Qureshi et al., 2018b; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017). Therefore, in the BoP contexts, the emerging digitally-enabled sharing economy models might be structured differently compared to their counterparts in non-BoP contexts. Some early evidence suggests that in the BoP context sharing economy models exist to serve communities who have often been excluded from or are unable to meet their needs through more traditional models (Bhatt et al., 2021; Escobedo et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2021). As with social enterprise models (Bhatt et al., 2019; Qureshi et al., 2016; Qureshi et al., 2018b; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017), scholars have also highlighted the role of cultures and social norms in facilitating or inhibiting sharing economy models. Extant research reports instances of discrimination against and exclusion of certain groups by users of sharing economy platforms (Attri & Bapuji, 2021; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; Törnberg & Chiappini, 2019). Due to the cultural diversity of the BoP population, the study of digitally enabled sharing economy models in these marginalized communities has the potential to highlight the discrimination, exclusion, and harassment experienced and/or perpetuated by those sharing their skills, services, or assets on sharing economy platform.

The sharing economy and social capital at the BoP

More than purely market-based transactions, the sharing economy is claimed to be embedded in social interactions (Escobedo et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021b; Schor, 2016). It is often suggested that social capital is an antecedent of the sharing economy; without social capital, collaborative consumption will not happen. Social capital is the glue and grease of collaboration. The trust among sharing economy members is necessary to run the sharing economy effectively. Similarly, due to exposure and repeated interactions among the members of the sharing economy, there is a possibility of strengthening social capital among the

members. Thus, social capital represents a potential antecedent and an outcome of the digitally-enabled sharing economy models. This becomes all the more important for the base of the pyramid contexts, as arguably, the most important asset they have is social capital (Bhatt, 2017, Bhatt, 2021). We encourage researchers to explore how digitally enabled sharing economy models bring people together to strengthen social capital and when, how, and why they fail to do so. We also encourage research that examines mechanisms used to leverage the existing social capital in these communities to develop innovative digitally enabled sharing economy models. It would also be important to investigate the risk and challenges of leveraging community social capital for the economic gains of a few lest the most important asset of the poor (i.e., social capital) gets damaged. In addition, and building on the previous theme of discrimination and exclusion, it would be interesting to investigate the role of bridging and bonding ties in the community to support (or not) various digitally-enabled sharing economy models.

Sharing economy at the BoP and climate change

The cost-saving and utilization of idle assets might be primary drivers behind the rise of the digitally enabled sharing economy models. However, many users of sharing economy products and services are also motivated by their belief that sharing economy helps reduce their carbon footprints. Some sharing economy models such as ridesharing (Cai et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2017), clothing libraries (Zamani et al., 2017), and collaborative consumption (Hamari et al., 2016), in general, are driven by a growing environmental consciousness (Shalini et al., 2021). These models include renting, trading, swapping, and borrowing goods rather than owning these products. The critical implication of sharing goods and effective utilization of idle assets is that the traditional thinking about the ownership of the resources is increasingly challenged. There is optimism that collaborative consumption models of the digitally enabled sharing economy will reduce environmental impacts. However, empirical results of the environmental performance of various sharing economy models have been mixed (Zamani et al., 2017), highlighting the uncertain nature of environmental benefits, opportunities, pitfalls, and challenges. A common challenge is that sharing might reduce the demand for new assets, but the easy access to (rented or shared) assets might actually increase overall consumption, which can more than offset the reduction in environmental damage on account of reduction in the asset ownership. This debate around the impact of digitally-enabled sharing economy models on the environment and climate change is important for BoP contexts, as more than 57% population of the world lives there and would face the most adverse consequences of climate change. Thus, investigation of digitally-enabled sharing economy models at the BoP that cut down the carbon footprints and help mitigate the impact of climate change is not only an interesting research topic but also has important policy implications.

Key questions

This call for papers is to explore the potential and challenges of digitally enabled sharing economy models at the BoP. Some of the suggested questions for the papers are mentioned below, but neither they are exhaustive nor restrictive:

- *How do the digitally enabled sharing economy models at the BoP address the challenges of resource-constrained environments? How do technology affordances affect the structuring of such models?*
- *What are the key principles that drive and accelerate the growth of digitally enabled sharing economy models for BoP communities? What types of risks and challenges do these models face? How can these initiatives be sustained?*

- *What are the emerging community-led social innovation models of sharing economy that leverage digital technologies and are designed or geared towards low-income communities? How do such models promote equitable distribution of the generated value? What is the potential positive impact? What are the risks inherent with these digital social innovations?*
- *What roles do social entrepreneurship, social intermediation, and digital social innovation play in promoting and suppressing digitally-enabled sharing economy models at the BoP?*
- *What are the roles of cultural and social factors in facilitating and stifling digitally-enabled sharing economy models at the BoP?*
- *Is digitally-enabled sharing economy models changing the perception about consumption and ownership of those living in the BoP?*
- *How can governments, businesses, and development institutions foster the growth of digitally enabled sharing economy models that empowers poor communities?*
- *How to make digitally-enabled sharing economy models more inclusive? Do these models tackle the societal issues of inequality and discrimination or perpetuate such issues?*
- *What are the implications of social capital for the growth of digitally enabled sharing economy models? How do such models affect the social capital of the BoP communities?*
- *What are the environmental implications of digitally enabled sharing economy models at the BoP?*
- *Does digitally-enabled sharing economy models encourage better resource utilization at the BoP or leads to misplacement of scarce resources at the BoP?*
- *How can digitally-enabled sharing economy models at the BoP achieve a balance between social, economic, and environmental impacts?*
- *What are the implications of privacy and security concerns of the digitally enabled sharing economy models for the BoP communities? How do intermediaries identify and mitigate such concerns or exploit the vulnerabilities of the BoP communities?*

Timeline

- Deadline for extended abstract January 30, 2022 (submission of abstract is optional)
    - Please submit 3000 words abstract to desem@iimu.ac.in
- Communication of feedback to abstract authors: February 10, 2022
- Workshop at IIM-Udaipur: *March 9-10, 2022* (in person if conditions allow, hybrid or virtual otherwise) (participation in the workshop is optional)
- The submission window for full paper: ***September 1, 2022*** – ***December 31, 2022***

Reviews will be conducted on a rolling basis. *Authors can submit their papers at any time after September 1, 2022, and before December 31, 2022*. Submitted papers will be immediately screened by the SI Editorial Board to ensure that they fit the objectives of the SI and ISJ. It is expected that a manuscript will generally go through a maximum of three rounds of revision before a final decision is reached.

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